

WAS A CAT KILLED OR A WOMAN MURDERED?

The Terrible Puzzle of Marcel Prevost.

Marcel Prevost's eerie and macabre story of "The Woman and the Cat," although in the French it has been characterized as a tale of strange and mysterious power, has never until now been translated into English. The present weird adaptation of the work printed in the current Bookman and here made by Dr. Harry Thurston Peck, professor of the Latin language and of literature at Columbia University. The possibility of an actual poisoning of the soul and body of a human being has vexed many minds in many ages outside of Italy and the land of Buddha. It is this idea which M. Prevost has woven in the haunting and terrible story which Professor Peck has so vividly done over into English.

"Yes," said our old friend Triboudeaux, a man of culture and a philosopher, who was a combination rarely found among army surgeons: "Yes, the supernatural is everywhere; it surrounds us and haunts us in and permeates us. If science pursues it, it takes flight and cannot be grasped. Our deadliest enemies, those ancestors of ours who cleared a few acres of forest; whenever they approached the limits of their clearings they heard low growls and saw glowering eyes, every where staring them in the face. I myself have had the sensation of having approached the souls of the departed several times in my life, and one occasion in particular." A young man present interrupted him: "Doctor, you are evidently dying to tell us a story. Come now, begin!" The doctor bowed. "No, I am not in the least anxious, I assure you. I tell this story as seldom as possible, for it disturbs those who hear it, and it disturbs me also."

However, if you wish it, here it is: In 1893 I was a young physician stationed at Orleans, in that particular city, full of aristocratic old residences, it is difficult to find a bachelor apartment. As I like both plenty of air and plenty of room, I took up my lodging on the first floor of a large building situated just outside the city, near Saint-Euverte. It had been originally constructed to serve as the warehouse of a manufacturer of rugs. In course of time the manufacturer had failed, and this big barrack had been left falling out of repair through lack of tenants, had been sold for a song with all its furnishings. The purchaser hoped to make a future profit out of his purchase, for the city was growing in that direction, and, as a matter of fact, I believe that at the present time the house is included within the city limits. When I took up my quarters there, however, the mansion stood alone on the verge of the open country at the end of a straggling street, on which a few houses produced at dusk the impression of a jaw from which most of the teeth have fallen out.

I had been living there for about two months, when, one night in July, on returning to my rooms, I saw with a good deal of surprise a light shining through the windows of the other apartment on the same floor, which I had supposed to be uninhabited. The effect of this light was extraordinary. It lit up with a pale red perfectly distinct reflection parts of the balcony, the street below, and a bit of the neighboring roofs.

I thought to myself, "Alas! I have a neighbor!" The idea, indeed, was not altogether agreeable, for I had been rather proud of my exclusive proprietorship. On reaching my bedroom I passed noiselessly out upon the balcony, but already the light had been extinguished. So I went back into my room, and sat down to read for an hour or two. From time to time I seemed to hear about me, as though within the walls, light footsteps; but after finishing my book I went to bed, and speedily fell asleep.

About midnight I suddenly awoke with a curious feeling that something was standing beside me. I raised myself in bed, lit a candle, and this is what I saw: In the middle of the room stood an immense cat, gazing upon me with phosphorescent eyes, and with its back slightly arched. It was a magnificent animal, with long fur and a fluffy tail, and of a remarkable color—exactly like that of the yellow silk that one sees in cocoons—so that, as the light gleamed upon its coat, the animal seemed to be made of gold.

"It slowly moved toward me on its velvety paws, softly rubbing its sinuous body against my legs. I leaned over to stroke it, and it permitted my caress, purring, and finally leaping upon my knees. I noticed then that it was a female cat, quite young, and that she seemed disposed to permit me to pet her as long as ever I would. Finally, however, I let her down upon the floor and tried to induce her to leave the room; but she leaped away from me and hid herself somewhere among the furniture, though as soon as I had blown out my candle she jumped upon my bed. Being sleepy, however, I didn't molest her, but dropped off into a doze, and the next morning, when I awoke in broad daylight, I could find no sign of the animal at all.

"That the human brain is a very delicate instrument, and one that is easily thrown out of gear. Before I proceed, just sum up for yourselves the facts that I have mentioned: a light seen and presently extinguished in an apartment supposed to be uninhabited; and a cat of a remarkable color, which appeared and disappeared in a way that was slightly mysterious. Now, there isn't anything very strange about that, is there? Very well, imagine now, that these unimportant facts are repeated day after day under the same conditions throughout a whole week, and then, believe me, they become of importance enough to impress the mind of a man who is living all alone, and to produce in him a slight disturbance such as I spoke of in commencing my story. The human mind is so formed that it always unconsciously applies the principle of the *quæstio*, and for every series of facts that are identical, it demands a cause, a law; and a vague dismay seizes upon it when it is unable to guess this cause and to trace out this law.

"I made up my mind, therefore, to ferret out the truth. I questioned my caretaker, and found that he knew nothing about my neighbors. Every morning an old woman came to look after the neighboring apartment; my caretaker had tried to question her, but other she was completely deaf so she was unwilling to give him any information, for she had refused to answer a single word. Nevertheless, I was able to explain satisfactorily the first thing that I had noted—that is to say, the sudden extinction of the light at night. I entered the house, and I had observed that the windows next to mine were covered only by long lace curtains; and as the two balconies were connected, my neighbor, whether man or woman, had no doubt a wish to prevent my indiscreet inquisitiveness on my part, and therefore had always put out the light on hearing me come in. To verify this supposition, I tried a very simple experiment, which succeeded perfectly. I had a cold supper brought in one day about noon by my servant, and that evening I did not go out. When darkness came on, I took my station near my window. Presently I saw the balcony shining with the light that streamed through the windows of the neighboring apartment. At once I slipped quietly out upon my balcony, and stepped softly over the ironwork that separated the two parts.

"To lovers of nature in her various moods, well-known author. While dealing entirely with Southern characters, the negro is but an incident in the story. Mr. Harris has gone into the upper classes of his beloved Southland for his people, and he has built a very pretty story. The plot is not remarkable, but it is in the faithful representation of the characteristics of the people with whom his story has to do that the charm lies. It is a most interesting story, and would seem to indicate that Mr. Harris is trying to get away from Uncle Remus and his other negro characters, such as Conan Doyle insisted on putting company with the famous Sherlock Holmes.

"A Little Girl of Long Ago" is a charming child's book issued by the same house. The author, Eliza Orne White, has written many interesting stories of child life for children. It is charmingly illustrated, and would be an acceptable gift to almost any child.

"To lovers of nature in her various moods, well-known author. While dealing entirely with Southern characters, the negro is but an incident in the story. Mr. Harris has gone into the upper classes of his beloved Southland for his people, and he has built a very pretty story. The plot is not remarkable, but it is in the faithful representation of the characteristics of the people with whom his story has to do that the charm lies. It is a most interesting story, and would seem to indicate that Mr. Harris is trying to get away from Uncle Remus and his other negro characters, such as Conan Doyle insisted on putting company with the famous Sherlock Holmes.

"I saw a very chamber, furnished quite elegantly, though it was obviously out of repair, and lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling. At the end of the room was a low sofa, upon which was reclining a woman who seemed to me to be both young and pretty. Her long hair fell over her shoulders in a rain of gold. She was looking at herself in a hand mirror, patting herself, passing her arms over her lips, and looking about her with a curious, feline grace. Every movement that she made caused her long hair to ripple in glistening undulations.

"As I gazed upon her I confess that I felt a little troubled, especially when all of a sudden the young girl's eyes were fixed upon me—strange eyes, eyes of a phosphorescent green that gleamed like the flames of a lamp. I was sure that I was invisible, being on the dark side of a curtained window. That was simple enough; yet, nevertheless, I felt that I was seen. The girl, in fact, uttered a cry, and then turned and looked her face in the sofa pillows.

"I raised the window, stepped into the room toward the sofa, and leaned over the face that she was hiding. As I did so, being really very remorseful, I began to excuse and to accuse myself, calling myself all sorts of names, and begging pardon for my indiscretion. I said that I deserved to be driven from her presence, but begged not to be sent away without at least a word of pardon. For a long time I pleaded thus without success, but at last she slowly turned, and I saw that the fair young face was stirred with just the faintest suggestion of a smile. When she caught a glimpse of me, she murmured something of which I did not then get the meaning.

"It is you!" she cried out. "It is you!" "As she said this, and as I looked at her, not knowing yet exactly what to answer, I was harassed by the thought, 'Where on earth have I already seen this pretty face, this look, this very gesture?' Little by little, however, I found my tongue, and, after saying a few more words in apology for my unpardonable curiosity, and getting brief but not offensive answers, I took leave of her, and retiring through the window by which I had come, went back to my own room. Arriving there, I sat for a long time at the window in the darkness, charmed by the face that I had seen, and yet singularly disquieted. This woman so beautiful so amiable, living so near to me, who said to me, 'It is you,' exactly as though she had already known me, who spoke so little, who answered all my questions with evasion, excited in me a feeling of fear. She had, indeed, told me her name—Linda—and that was all. I tried in vain to drive away the remembrance of her greenish eyes, which in the darkness seemed still to gleam upon me, and of those glints which like electric sparks, shone in her long hair whenever she stroked it with her hand. Finally, however, I retired for the night. But scarcely was my head upon the pillow when I felt some moving body descend upon my feet. The cat had appeared again. I tried to chase her away, but she kept returning again and again, until I ended by resigning myself to her presence, and, just as before, I went to sleep with this strange companion near me. Yet my rest was this time a troubled one, and broken by strange and fitful dreams.

"Have you ever experienced the sort of mental obsession which gradually causes the brain to be mastered by some single absurd idea—an idea almost insane, and one which your reason and your will alike rebel, but which nevertheless gradually blends itself with your thought, fastens itself upon your mind, and grows and grows? I suffered cruelly in this way on the days that followed my strange adventure. Nothing new occurred, but in the evening, going out upon the balcony, I found Linda standing upon her side of the iron fence. We chatted together for a while in the half-darkness, and, as before, I returned to my room to find that in a few moments the golden cat appeared, leaped upon my bed, made a nest for herself there, and remained until the morning. I knew now to whom the cat belonged, for Linda had answered that very same evening, on my speaking of it, 'Oh, yes, my cat; doesn't she look exactly as though she were made of gold?' As I said, nothing new had occurred; yet, nevertheless, a vague sort of terror began little by little to master me and to develop itself in my mind, at first merely as a bit of foolish fancy, and then as a haunting belief that dominated my entire thought, so that I perpetually seemed to see a thing which it was in reality quite impossible to see.

"Why, it's easy enough to guess," interrupted the young lady who had spoken at the beginning of his story, "Linda and the cat were the same thing."

Triboudeaux smiled. "I should not have been quite so positive as that," he said, "even then; but I cannot deny that this ridiculous fancy haunted me for many hours. I was endeavoring to catch a little sleep amid the insomnia that a too active brain produced. Yes, there were moments when these two beings with greenish eyes, sinuous movements, golden hair and mysterious ways seemed to me to be blended into one, and to be merely the double manifestation of a single entity. As I said, I saw Linda again and again, but, in spite of all my efforts to come upon her unexpectedly, I never was able to see them both at the same time. I tried to reason with myself, to convince myself that there was nothing really inexplicable in all of this, and I ridiculed myself for being afraid both of a woman and of a harmless cat. In truth, at the end of all my reasoning, I found that I was not so much afraid of the animal alone or of the woman alone, but rather of a sort of duality which existed in my fancy and inspired me with a fear of something that was incorporeal—fear of a manifestation of my own spirit, fear of a vague thought, which is, indeed, the very worst of fears.

"I began to be mentally disturbed. After long evenings spent in confidential and very unconventional chats with Linda, in which, little by little, my feelings took on the color of love, I passed long days of secret torment, such as unpleasant mania must experience. Gradually a resolve began to grow up in my mind—a desire that became more and more imperious in demanding a solution of this harassing and tormenting doubt; and the more I cured for Linda the more it seemed absolutely necessary to push this resolve to its fulfillment. I decided to kill the cat.

"One evening, before meeting Linda on the balcony, I took out of my medical cabinet a jar of glycerine and a small bottle of hydrocyanic acid, together with one of those little pencils of glass which chemists use in mixing certain corrosive substances. That evening, for the first time, Linda allowed me to caress her. I held her to my arms and passed my hand over her long hair, which snuggled and creaked under my touch in a succession of tiny sparks. As soon as I regained my room the golden cat, as usual, appeared before me. I called her to me; she rubbed herself against me with arched back and extended tail, purring the while with the greatest amiability. I took the glass pencil in my hand, moistened the point in the glycerine, and held it out to the animal, which licked it with her long red tongue. I did this three or four times, but at the fourth time I dipped the pencil in the acid. The cat unobtrusively touched it with her tongue. In an instant she became rigid, and a moment after a frightful tetanic convulsion caused her to leap twice into the air, and then to fall upon the floor with a dreadful cry—a cry that was truly human. She was dead!

"With the perspiration starting from my forehead and with trembling hands I threw myself upon the floor beside the body that was not yet cold. The starting eyes had a look that froze me with horror. The blackened tongue was thrust out between the teeth; the limbs exhibited the most remarkable contortions. I moved all my courage with a violent effort of will, took the animal by the paws, and left the house. Hurrying down the silent street, I proceeded to the quay along the banks of the Loire, and, on reaching there, threw my burden into the river. Until daylight I roamed around the city, just where I know not and not until the sky began to grow pale and then to be flushed with light did I at last have the courage to return home.

"As I laid my hand upon the door I shivered. I had a dread of finding there still living, as in the celebrated tale of Poe, the animal that I had so lately put to death. But my room was empty. I fell, faint-fainting, upon my bed, and for the first time I slept, with a perfect sense of being all alone, a sleep like that of a beast or of a machine, until morning came.

"Some one here interrupted, breaking in upon the profound silence in which we had been listening. "I can guess the end. Linda disappeared at the same time as the cat!" "You are perfectly well," replied Triboudeaux, "that there exists between the facts of this story a curious coincidence, since you are able to guess so exactly their relation. Yes, Linda disappeared. They found in her apartment her dresses, her linen, all, even to the night robe she was to have worn that night, but there was nothing that could give the slightest clue to her identity. The owner of the house had let the apartment to 'Mademoiselle Linda, concert singer.' He knew nothing more."

"The Old World Series" "The Ballads and Lyrics of Old France," with other poems by Andrew Lang, is now ready, and is also "The Enchanted" (continued) of H. J. Aldrich. The translation is by Captain Sir Richard F. Burton, and it ranks next to the Rubaiyat as the best of poems from the ancient writers of the far East. It is little known outside of Oriental societies, and Mr. Mosher is the first publisher to give it a general sale. There are, in fact, no more beautiful books for Christmas or any time than these literary dainties of Mr. Mosher.

From Mr. Mosher's workshop also comes a charming edition of "The Child in the House," by the author of "The Child in the House." It is a beautiful story, little known to the general reading public, but admired and loved by the fortunate ones who know Mr. Pater and his work. "The Story of Amie and Annie," translated by William Morris, and "The Deceit of Guenevere," a book of lyrics chosen from works of Mr. Morris, are two

volumes that will be appreciated by lovers of the best in current literature. "Arctostaphylos and Nicoletta," done into English by Andrew Lang, is a very fine translation of this exquisite old French love story and is most attractively bound for a Christmas gift.

"Heroes of Wagnerian Opera" is the title of a volume issued by the Bodley Head, John Lane, which is similar in binding and press work to the volume issued last year, "Heroes of Wagnerian Opera." To admirers and students of the works of the great German composer, the book will prove a very valuable acquisition.

A more appropriate gift for a boy could scarcely be imagined than Dan Beard's book, issued by Scribner. It is a complete compendium and guide to all the games and amusements dear to boyish hearts. It tells how to do the festive party, how to construct and fly kites, how to set traps for small game, and the hundred sports that belong to the days of childhood.

J. M. Barrie's beautiful tribute to his mother, published under the title of "Margaret Ogilvy," is among the holiday books from the Scribners. This delightful volume has already been reviewed in the Sunday Journal, and admirers of Mr. Barrie who have read this, his latest book, are charmed beyond measure at this loving story of the gifted mother of a gifted son. While a little of Mr. Barrie's usual style of fiction, the digression is a most pleasing one. It is a charming Christmas gift.



THE WOMAN AND THE CAT

HERE ARE A FEW CHRISTMAS BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

TO LOVERS of things bookish, the beautiful editions put out by the publishers for the holiday trade are a rare treat. Almost without exception they are typical of the highest possible degree of excellence in the bookmaker's art. The tendency toward the beautiful in books has to have reached its zenith. It would be hard indeed to imagine anything more artistic and exquisite than some of the volumes which have recently issued from the presses of the several publishers who are noted for their efforts and results in this direction. All the result is that each year more and more books are being bought for Christmas gifts. Old friends in new bindings and new covers bidding for friendship and admiration are to be seen in the bookshelves' windows.

From the quaint, old workshop of Copeland & Day, of Boston, have come many of the prettiest and daintiest volumes of the year. An atmosphere of artistic bookishness seems to exude from their queer little place in Cornhill. It is a bit of old England transplanted to Boston soil, and one could easily imagine himself in old Fleet street, where masters of books arrived and departed for decades.

A more beautiful Christmas gift than their delightful edition of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese" would be hard to find. It is done up in the very old English style, with parchment covers and the text in old Gothic

type, and is a treasure to book lovers. Another charming book which was issued from the same publishers is "Meadow Grass," by Alice Brown. It breathes of New England, with its traditions and customs, and is most attractively bound, and is sure to be always welcome for a new year as it has been during the old.

Since Dore illustrated the French edition of well-known fairy tales but little serious attention has been paid to this part of the annual production of children's books. There has been a characteristic sameness about the pictures, and in many cases they were but repainted from previously used plates. This year, however, the publishers seem to have tried with each other in producing something new and novel for the little ones.

The Bodley Head, which has recently established a branch house in New York, have issued a volume called "Wynne and Other Fairy Tales," with illustrations in colors by Mrs. Percy Dearmer. The pictures would seem to continue the tradition of the Bodley Head style in juvenile literature, for Mrs. Dearmer has evidently taken the strange English artist's style for her model. But the illustrations are remarkably interesting and the children will doubtless appreciate something new as

much as do their grown-up brothers and sisters.

Another striking example of the same feature is found in Louise Chandler Moulton's book of child's stories, "In Childhood's Country," issued by Copeland & Day, for which the pictures were done by Miss Ethel Reed, of Boston. Miss Reed is perhaps better known in the world of poster art than in book illustrating. She is a very clever Boston girl, who has made a big success with her poster work, and has but recently taken to the more serious work of illustrating books. In her pictures for Mrs. Moulton's book she follows out her poster style with most agreeable results.

McLoughlin Brothers, of New York, the well-known publishers of children's books, have issued some very attractive volumes. A great deal of attention has been devoted by them to old shapes as well as new styles of illustrations. "Jack and the Beanstalk," the "Mother Goose" melodies and other books that children had pleasure in have been issued by this firm in a most attractive manner.

"Sister Jane," by Joel Chandler Harris, of Uncle Remus fame, is one of the new books offered by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. It is in a field not before explored for the

well-known author. While dealing entirely with Southern characters, the negro is but an incident in the story. Mr. Harris has gone into the upper classes of his beloved Southland for his people, and he has built a very pretty story. The plot is not remarkable, but it is in the faithful representation of the characteristics of the people with whom his story has to do that the charm lies. It is a most interesting story, and would seem to indicate that Mr. Harris is trying to get away from Uncle Remus and his other negro characters, such as Conan Doyle insisted on putting company with the famous Sherlock Holmes.

"A Little Girl of Long Ago" is a charming child's book issued by the same house. The author, Eliza Orne White, has written many interesting stories of child life for children. It is charmingly illustrated, and would be an acceptable gift to almost any child.

"To lovers of nature in her various moods, well-known author. While dealing entirely with Southern characters, the negro is but an incident in the story. Mr. Harris has gone into the upper classes of his beloved Southland for his people, and he has built a very pretty story. The plot is not remarkable, but it is in the faithful representation of the characteristics of the people with whom his story has to do that the charm lies. It is a most interesting story, and would seem to indicate that Mr. Harris is trying to get away from Uncle Remus and his other negro characters, such as Conan Doyle insisted on putting company with the famous Sherlock Holmes.

Mifflin & Co. have issued of "Frisar Rome's Beautiful Book," gotten up in quaint and medieval style, with the text in Gothic type and the pages illuminated after the style of the Middle Ages. With its imitation of wood covers, tied with brown ribbon, it is a dainty, pleasant reminder of a mixture of the first and last in the art of bookmaking.

A source of great pleasure to the admirers of the great French novelist, Victor Hugo, will be found in the first ever volume of his correspondence, up to 1855, which is on sale by Scribner. It has been very carefully edited, and the letters serve to show the writer's most pertinent characteristics in the days when history was making fast in the first quarter of the century.

From each blank Matine comes some of the daintiest, most attractive books of the year—from the workshop of Thomas Mosher, of Portland. Wise men have said, and wise men have confirmed the statement that should the literature of the world be narrowed down to three books, the three should be the Bible, Shakespeare and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. Mr. Mosher evidently agrees with the observation, and the lovers of the Rubaiyat have him

well-known author. While dealing entirely with Southern characters, the negro is but an incident in the story. Mr. Harris has gone into the upper classes of his beloved Southland for his people, and he has built a very pretty story. The plot is not remarkable, but it is in the faithful representation of the characteristics of the people with whom his story has to do that the charm lies. It is a most interesting story, and would seem to indicate that Mr. Harris is trying to get away from Uncle Remus and his other negro characters, such as Conan Doyle insisted on putting company with the famous Sherlock Holmes.